

Running head: FIRE PARAMEDIC JOB SATISFACTION AND RETENTION

Executive Development

Fire Paramedic Job Satisfaction and Retention

in the Newport Beach Fire Department

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Abstract

Fire paramedic retention is one of the most important issues facing the Newport Beach Fire Department (NBFD). The need to recruit and retain tenured fire paramedics is vitally important to maintain the high level of paramedic pre-hospital care in Newport Beach. This research used an on-line survey to measure empowerment, job satisfaction, productivity, and intentions to quit. The survey was sent to NBFD fire paramedics and other paramedics from across the nation. A total of 348 surveys were returned. The results of this study indicate that on the whole paramedics are satisfied with their job and perceive a high level of productivity. Fire paramedics' responses to three of the four levels of cognitions (competence, self-determination, and impact) revealed a decrease in their perceived level of empowerment. NBFD fire paramedics had lower percentages for the same three levels of cognition than other paramedics across the nation. This result was further reviewed and compared to the NBFD fire paramedic responses on intentions to quit. NBFD fire paramedics differed from other paramedics revealing over half the NBFD fire paramedics intend to look for another position within the next year. These findings suggest that increasing NBFD fire paramedic's confidence in their job functions, allowing greater autonomy within the job position, and providing influence over job related outcomes should increase the level of empowerment for NBFD fire paramedics. Consistent with reviewed research, an increase in feelings of empowerment translates into stronger organizational commitment and ultimately, job retention.

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Introduction

The Newport Beach Fire Department (NBFD) is currently experiencing high turnover in the fire paramedic position resulting in vacant paramedic positions and increased overtime costs. The fire department recently recognized that their fire paramedics were leaving after a very short tenure in the rank. Traditionally, fire paramedics at the NBFD were their most tenured personnel. This position requires an individual who truly desires the challenge of an advanced medical role and the responsibility of managing patient care in an emergency environment under stressful conditions. The NBFD is challenged with developing a successful method for recruiting and selecting suitable candidates for the fire paramedic rank. It is important to fill this position with qualified individuals who understand the roles and responsibilities of a fire paramedic and envisions this position as a milestone in their career.

The purpose of this research project is to improve the recruitment and selection process in order to retain the trained employees in the fire paramedic position at the NBFD. To properly address this issue, this project examines job related discrepancies between the NBFD fire paramedic and other fire fighter paramedics around the nation. Specifically, this project researches factors that contribute to job satisfaction, paramedics' perceived level of empowerment, and self-reported productivity. The project evaluates whether job satisfaction and perceived empowerment affects fire paramedics' intentions to leave the position. An online survey developed and based on the literature was conducted with fire paramedics to collect descriptive information and provide insight with respect to the high turnover rate in the fire paramedic position at the NBFD.

Background and Significance

The NBFD is a full service fire safety organization protecting 85,000 to 100,000 permanent residents within forty three square miles of coastal Orange County, California. The geographic area is characterized by lowlands graduating to rolling hills and is bordered by the Pacific Ocean and dissected by a natural bay. The authorized service allotment consists of 140 sworn fire and lifeguard personnel and 200 seasonal ocean lifeguards. The NBFD personnel deliver ocean safety, fire suppression, prevention, community education and paramedic service to this affluent suburban community south of Los Angeles. This public safety service is provided from eight fire stations and one lifeguard facility strategically located throughout the community. The city approved authorization for 24 paramedics in the fire department. For every 24-hour shift, eight fire paramedics service Newport Beach, 365 days each year. The location of each paramedic unit is strategically placed throughout the community to minimize emergency response time to all areas of the City.

NBFD Past Paramedic Programs

The paramedic program began in Newport Beach in 1975 (T. Arnold, personal communication, June 23, 2008) and has undergone gradual growth in both the total number of assigned fire paramedics and where and how these paramedics are deployed. In the inception of the program, there was only a single paramedic van stationed in the center of the city and staffed with two fire paramedics, twenty four hours each day, seven days per week. The paramedics were assigned to a vehicle that was not designed for patient transportation. Further, the paramedics did not have direct responsibility to a company officer except when they were on a call or in the fire station. Perhaps even more unusual was that the line of supervision went from fire paramedic to battalion chief, further distancing the paramedic team from the other

firefighters. This early system lacked direct supervision over the paramedics and often the fire paramedic's time was unaccounted for while on-duty, due to this supervisory gap.

Expansion of the program in 1977 included a second paramedic team to manage the increasing call volume and to balance the deployment on both sides of the Upper Newport Bay (T. Arnold, personal communication, June 23, 2008). This raised the number of on duty paramedics to four, stationed in two paramedic vans on each side of the city. Also, in May of 1977, the program continued to develop, allowing a fifth paramedic on duty each shift and the realignment of the chain-of-command to include the company officer in the line of supervision (B. Pingle, personal communication, June 23, 2008). The additional paramedic was assigned to a truck company with direct supervision by a fire captain and available to fill-in vacant paramedic positions for unplanned events, including sick and injury leave needs. This was an important enhancement to the staffing plan as it permitted the operations division the ability to maintain two-paramedic teams to cover the city following a leave request on short notice due to unexpected leave requests.

The most significant change occurred in 1995 when three additional paramedics and a third paramedic team were authorized to cover the city on a twenty four-hour shift, seven days each week (T. Riley, personal communication, June 21, 2008). The change included a provision that established an ambulance transportation element to the paramedic program. This modification meant that all emergency medical calls, whether basic life support (BLS) or advanced life support (ALS), requiring transport to a local hospital would now be done in a fire department paramedic ambulance. The addition of patient transportation as an expansion of paramedic service delivery added a significant workload to the paramedic job as BLS patient transportation would now be done by fire paramedics. BLS patient transportation accounts for

40% of the emergency medical call volume and results in longer time commitment of the paramedic resource for BLS patient transportation (C. Ord, personal communication, April 13, 2008).

NBFD Current Paramedic Program

Recently, the NBFD acknowledged difficulty attracting and retaining fire paramedics. This trend emerged within the past five years as new and veteran fire paramedics willingly demoted to the rank of fire engineer at a lower salary scale. During the period of 2003 to 2008, five fire paramedics have demoted to fire engineer (C. Duncan, personal communication, March 27, 2008).

NBFD hires fire paramedics strictly through an internal promotional process. Firefighters and fire engineers who are currently employed by the fire department are eligible for this type of promotion. If successful, a candidate will be sponsored during a seven month training program and receive a substantial pay increase set between the salary schedule of fire engineer and fire captain (City of Newport Beach, 2007). For reasons not entirely clear, the department experienced a shortage of people willing to volunteer for the training and subsequent promotion. In fact, our recent experience shows that members were using the paramedic promotional as a stepping stone to other positions in the organization, some of which paid less total salary. This was both concerning to the department administration and problematic to the operations division as minimum staffing became a daily concern and the paramedics were historically considered long-term, highly skilled employees (C. Ord, personal communication, April 13, 2008). More importantly, the job of a paramedic is one that benefits greatly from experience. This type of on-the-job learning is really another step in the educational process of a fully developed fire paramedic. In an organization such as NBFD that hires from the entry level up and only current

employees can become fire paramedics, it is essential that the fire department maintain a watchful eye on the staffing situation at all times. When no one answers the call to be trained, and expanding numbers of those currently in rank begin leaving the position for demotion or promotion, the minimum staffing levels needed to adequately maintain the program can rapidly become a critical issue.

The NBFD enacted emergency measures twice during the past 5 years because of the increasing numbers of forced overtime in the fire paramedic rank (C. Duncan, personal communication, March 27, 2008). The emergency measures were enacted as a measure to relieve the forced hiring of the existing fire paramedics and involved the recertification of fire captains to fill-in, as needed, on an overtime basis (D. Mais, personal communication, February 6, 2008). This strategy was used to fill the vacant paramedic positions with fire captains and reduced some of the forced overtime burden on the paramedic rank. The approach was first seen as a method of resolving what was thought to be a short-term problem. Over time, the NBFD learned that the problem with recruitment and retention of fire paramedics would not be resolved with the current strategy.

The ramifications of this issue are far reaching in that it impacts the success of the fire paramedic program in the NBFD and the health and safety of the residents and visitors to the City. If NBFD management cannot resurrect the interest in the job of fire paramedic and enlist a sustainable cadre of new fire paramedics, then the program and the delivery of advanced life support to the community will suffer. This outcome will be poorly received in a community that prides itself as expecting and delivering the best that can be offered from its local government employees.

NBFD Future Paramedic Program

This project was completed in accordance with the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program research requirements. The research is associated with the United States Fire Administration's Operational Objective to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to emerging issues. There are many emerging issues impacting the fire service with respect to the multi-generational work force and the different value systems, learning styles and expectations of the Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers and Generation Y all working in the same location (Hastings, 2008). Specifically, the value system differences can be seen as recognition of a series of different experiences as the Traditionalists are a private group having experienced the Great Depression and World War II. Traditionalists' children, the Baby Boomers, are the hard working, anti-rules group that started the "workaholic" trend. The children of the Baby Boomers, Generation X, saw their parents laid-off or face job insecurity during the downsizing of American business in the 1980s. The newest members of the workforce, Millennials, were raised on high expectations and high technology. They display a great deal of self-confidence and are very technically literate (Durkin, 2008; National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association [NOAA], n.d.). These generational challenges are not unique to the fire service and there is a developing body of research into many other occupations regarding this issue. (Kelley, 2007; Stevenson, 2008; Raduege, 2008).

NBFD managers and supervisors will need to resolve the existing high turnover rate in this position. They will need to have an accurate understanding of what the issues are and what methods, techniques, and strategies can be implemented to effectively manage this work force. The existing leadership style between supervisors and subordinates, using transactional behaviors as discussed in the Executive Development course, may not be effectively meeting the

expectations of the newer, younger generation of firefighters. Additional challenges of long work hours and high stress activities of this complex work environment make the need for an effective plan even more important.

Literature Review

The NBFD is experiencing a high rate of employee turnover in the fire paramedic positions. This research study is investigating possible reasons for a fire paramedic to decertify and promote or demote out of the position. In reviewing the literature, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is often used as a source for understanding human behavior because it specifies internal mechanisms by which organizational environments can affect individual behavior (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Organizational researchers often refer to SCT when studying employee behavior (Koberg, Boss, Senjern, & Goodman, 1999; Spreitzer, 1995). Social Cognitive Theory suggests human behavior is a triadic, dynamic, and reciprocal interaction of three sets of factors: individual (cognitive and personal factors), behavior, i.e., performance, and environment, i.e., social systems or structures (Koberg et al., 1999; Wood & Bandura, 1969). This theory contends that behavior is largely regulated through cognitive processes, for example, through feedback and reciprocity, a person's own reality is formed by the interaction of the environment and one's cognitions (Wood & Bandura, 1969). When examining individual explanations, perceptions and interpretations of work behavior and attitudes within a particular work environment such as a job position, SCT is a useful framework.

Empowerment:

In accordance with SCT, Spreitzer (1995) tested four dimensions of psychological empowerment: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. These four dimensions contributed to the growing literature by developing and validating a measure of psychological

empowerment in the workplace. Broadly defined by Spreitzer, psychological empowerment is a motivation construct manifested in a set of four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact reflecting an individual's orientation to their work role (Spreitzer, 1995). In more detail, meaning refers to the fit between work requirements and individual's own ideals. Competence, in other words, self-efficacy, is an individual's belief in their capabilities to perform work activities. Self-determination reflects autonomy in the initiation of work behaviors. The dimension impact is the degree to which an individual influences strategic, administrative, or operating outcomes at work (Spreitzer, 1995). It is argued that the four cognitions are additive and necessary to create an overall construct of psychological empowerment. Further more, lacking any of the four elements of psychological empowerment results in reducing an individual's overall degree of felt empowerment. Also, empowerment is a personality trait that is not general across all life situations, but rather specific to the work environment (Spreitzer, 1995).

Researchers have used the SCT as the framework for investigating the effects of empowerment perceptions on work outcomes of individuals and organizations (Koberg et al., 1999). The purpose of this study was to examine whether an individual's perceived level of empowerment, e.g., high or low, was dependent on their level of education, tenure with the organization, gender, ethnicity, and locus of control. Spreitzer's multidimensional 12-item empowerment scale, along with other validated instruments were used to test a model demonstrating personal factors such as locus of control, tenure, gender, education, and ethnicity, and environmental factors, such as leader approachability, worth of group, group effectiveness, mutual influence, intragroup trust, and organizational rank, to determine an individual's level of

perceived empowerment. This, in turn, impacts personal and organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, productivity, and propensity to leave (Koberg et al., 1999).

A volunteer group of full-time professionals from a large private hospital were surveyed. The sample consisted of 129 men and 483 women nurses, dietitians, therapist, pharmacists, and other professionals. Since the research surveyed health-care professionals, it is possible to generalize these findings to fire department paramedics. The results of this study found that tenure with the organization, leader approachability, worth of the group, group effectiveness, and organizational rank influence feelings of empowerment (Koberg et al., 1999). Interestingly, these findings relate job satisfaction with feelings of empowerment and a subsequent improvement in employee retention. Additionally, perceptions of empowerment enhanced the value of work for individuals, increase job satisfaction, and contribute to work productivity and success (Koberg et al., 1999).

Job Satisfaction:

Research provides evidence that job satisfaction is an important factor in employee retentions (Caykoylu et al., 2007; Jones, 2006; Koberg et al., 1999; Meisinger, 2007; Pors & Johannsen, 2002). Up to 25% of the workforce will leave their job within three years because of dissatisfaction (Pors & Johannsen, 2002). A survey of 411 library managers concerning several dimensions of leadership such as perceptions of leadership roles, and structure and process of leadership found that much of the dissatisfaction was due to issues of management, confidence in career assistance, career development, and recognition (Pors & Johannsen, 2002).

Studies indicate a relationship between empowerment and job satisfaction (Caykoylu et al., 2007; Kober et al, 1999). If there are no or very few empowerment opportunities in the work place, this situation negatively affects levels of organizational commitment. In a study surveying

health care employees such as nurses, paramedical personnel, and non clinical personnel, it was hypothesized that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between organizational commitment and employee empowerment. Findings indicate more empowerment improves job satisfaction and a key variable in determining organizational commitment is job satisfaction (Caykoğlu et al., 2007). Thus, empowering employees is a method to increase organizational commitment which translates into employee retention and lower recruitment and training cost.

A similar finding reported by Meisinger (2007) shows high levels of employee satisfaction translate into increased employee commitment, productivity, and retention for organizations. Conversely, low levels of job satisfaction are associated with higher levels of absenteeism, decreased productivity and increased turnover. This survey also indicated that the top five aspects of job satisfaction were compensation, benefits, job security, balance between work and life, and communication between employees and senior management (Meisinger, 2007).

Productivity:

Is a happy worker a productive worker? The following study postulates that life satisfaction is positively related to performance (Jones, 2006). Using a convenience sampling strategy, 134 undergraduate management students volunteered to complete a survey on life satisfaction and performance level. The findings indicated that life satisfaction can predict employee performance on the job (Jones, 2006). However, contrary to expectations life satisfaction did not translate in to job satisfaction. This is important because it raises the question whether managers should work to make employees happy. If the evidence regarding life satisfaction reports that it is not related to job satisfaction, and we know from previous research that job satisfaction translates into organizational commitment, then we can assume that life

satisfaction is not related to employee retention (Jones, 2006; Meisinger, 2007; Caykoylu et al., 2007).

Intentions to Quit:

Job stress, lack of commitment to an organization and job dissatisfaction are variables that consistently correlate to employees' intentions to quit (Firth, Mellor & Loquet, 2004). This study investigates predictors of employee's intentions to quit. Questionnaires completed by sales people measured commitment to the organization which they worked, job satisfaction, stress, supervisor support, locus of control, self-esteem, perceived job stressors, and their intention to quit. The findings clearly state the major impact to reduce employees' intention to quit is to develop a sense of commitment to the organization thus creating job satisfaction. Satisfied employees are more committed to the organization (Firth et al., 2004). Additionally, the impact of stressors on employees' intentions to quit was substantial. The author's recommendations to reduce employee's intentions to quit and thus reduce turnover are for managers to actively monitor workloads, and the relationships between supervisors and subordinates to reduce and manage stress (Firth et al., 2004).

The purpose of this study is to identify a sustainable method for recruiting fire department paramedics to increase employee retention and reduce overhead cost for the NBFD. In an effort to identify a successful recruiting method for fire paramedics and to increase employee retention, this study is specifically looking at employees' intention to quit. From a review of the literature we have found that variables such as empowerment, job satisfaction, and less so, productivity, affect an employee's intention to quit. A survey was developed based on our literature review and sent to fire paramedics to evaluate factors that evaluate their intention to leave the position.

Fire Department Research:

One study addressed job satisfaction among employees of a fire department in Sioux Falls, South Dakota (Traut, Larsen, & Feimer, 2000). The study examined five aspects of job satisfaction: satisfaction with supervisor, satisfaction with agency relationships, satisfaction with job training, satisfaction with job content, and overall job satisfaction. The survey focused on job satisfaction and two important characteristics of the employees (number of years of service and rank within the organizations). Results of this study are limited by the lack of reporting of the methods and analysis used to produce the result. However, the study reports the effect of years in service on satisfaction was consistent across the five job satisfaction aspects and new employees are more satisfied in their job than longer-term employees. The author's recommendation for a successful workplace is to continually invest in longer-term employees. Fire departments struggle to maintain a competent and committed workforce as they continue to hire and train new employees; however, it is equally important to encourage a high level of dedication and willingness to learn from their longer-term employees through the latter stages of their careers (Traut et al., 2000). The challenge at the NBFD is to understand the recently discovered lack of interest in the job of fire paramedic.

This study will investigate the differences between NBFD fire paramedics and other fire department paramedics on perceived level of empowerment, job satisfaction, productivity, and intentions to leave the position. A survey was developed with these job related variables and to address the following research questions.

1. Do fire paramedics perceive the capacity to make decisions and influence others in their job, i.e., feel empowered?
2. What factors contribute to fire paramedics' level of job satisfaction?

3. Do fire paramedics feel that they are productive in their job?
4. Is there a difference between NBFD and other fire department paramedic's level of job satisfaction and perceived level of empowerment?
5. Do job satisfaction and perceived empowerment affect fire paramedics' intentions to leave the position?

Procedures

The survey was developed based on previous research studies on empowerment, job satisfaction, productivity, and intentions to quit (Firth et al., 2004; Koberg et al., 1999; Spreitzer, 1995). Since research in this area is plentiful, it was possible to find validated questions that successfully tap into the construct of interest. The survey is comprised of 29 questions: 10 questions on job satisfaction (Firth et al., 2004), 12 on empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995), one on productivity (Koberg et al., 1999), and five demographic questions (see Appendix A). With the exception of the productivity and demographic questions, the survey used a five-point Likert scale for responses (i.e., Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Each response has a value and the total score is obtained by adding the values for each response thus creating a 'summated scales' ("Research methods knowledge base: Likert scaling", [n.d.]

NBFD firefighters who are paramedics and other firefighter personnel similar in rank to the NBFD fire paramedics across the nation were the target population for this study. The survey was created using the software "SurveyMonkey.com." The survey is a readily available commercial product, e.g., SurveyMonkey, able to be sent online to fire service agencies. It was sent to firefighters nation-wide through three fire chiefs' association website administrators in the United States (California, Florida and Texas). The same survey was sent to 20 fire paramedics in NBFD using the business e-mail addresses of fire paramedics with an assurance

that while encouraged to complete the survey there would be no attempt to identify those who did or did not participate. In addition, it was made clear that participation in the survey was anonymous and voluntary. All survey recipients were provided with a plain language statement describing the rank or position of the firefighter paramedic that should complete the survey. It was important that recipients outside of the NBFD would have the same or similar position as those firefighter paramedics in Newport Beach where the paramedics are exclusively firefighters. As part of the awareness plan for the selected group of survey recipients in the NBFD, the recipients received one follow-up e-mail and a single verbal request conducted at the morning phone conference for each shift of fire paramedics.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the data. Frequencies of each question provided percentages for comparison among questions as well as across the two survey groups; NBFD and other fire paramedics. The 12 empowerment questions were clustered in groups of three for each of the four cognitions described in Spreitzer (1995), and a mean percentage was calculated for each of the four cognitions. The five-point Likert scale was collapsed into three categories: negative responses (Strongly disagree, and Disagree), neutral responses (Neutral), and positive responses (Strongly agree, and Agree). The survey responses for empowerment, job satisfaction, productivity, and intention to quit were compared across both fire paramedic groups. Additionally, the positive or negative responses to the empowerment and job satisfaction questions from each fire paramedic group were compared to assess whether the direction of the recipients responses correlated with their response to the intention to quit questions.

Results

The survey was emailed to 20 NBFD fire paramedics and sent nationally through three fire chiefs' association website administrators in the United States (California, Florida and Texas). The response rate for NBFD was 90% (18) with six (33%) incomplete surveys. The response rate for the survey sent nationally to other fire paramedics is not known. The chief association website administrators were requested to send the survey to as many fire departments as possible. A total of 330 surveys were returned with only 57 (17.2%) incompletes. The nationally sent survey obtained responses from 28 States and the District of Columbia. The two groups differed slightly in their demographic information. Table 1 shows that the NBFD respondents were slightly younger with less years of experience but more likely to have completed college than the other paramedics.

Table 1. Demographic Information

Demographic Information	NBFD	Other Paramedics
Males	100%	96%
Age (years)	30	39
% Completed College	67%	55%
Number of years in Service	8	14

The two groups demonstrated similar trends in their pattern of responses for empowerment, job satisfaction, and productivity. The responses for empowerment were categorized under four sets of cognition: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Responses from both groups tend to decrease for competence, self-determination, and impact, however; more so for NBFD fire paramedics (see table 2).

Table 2. Summary of Empowerment Data

Respondents	Four Cognitions of Empowerment			
	Meaning	Competence	Self-determination	Impact
NBFD	88%	66%	60%	21%
Other Paramedics	94%	87%	65%	24%

The job satisfaction questions were comparable for both the NBFD and the other paramedics (nationally surveyed). Table 3 indicates that overall fire paramedics responded positively (agree/strongly agree) to the job satisfaction questions. Responses for questions relating to recognition for good work and satisfied with their opportunity to advance to a better position had lower percentages for positive responses compared to the other job satisfaction questions.

Table 3. Summary of Job Satisfaction Data

Questions	Responses						
	NBFD				Other Paramedics		
	Neg	Neu	Pos		Neg	Neu	Pos
How satisfied are you:							
...with your job security?	19%	0%	81%		4%	3%	93%
...with the physical conditions of the firehouse and equipment?	25%	0%	75%		13%	9%	78%
...with the benefit package you receive for your job?	12%	0%	88%		14%	13%	73%
...with the pay you receive from your job?	19%	0%	81%		12%	9%	80%
...with the recognition you get when you do a good job?	13%	19%	69%		16%	29%	55%
...with the freedom you have to do the best you can at your job?	13%	13%	75%		8%	15%	78%
...with your advancement to better positions since you started?	19%	13%	69%		13%	22%	65%
...with the work you do?	13%	6%	81%		2%	5%	94%

There was a slight difference between the NBFD and other paramedics regarding their perceived productivity. The productivity scale ranged from 0-100, paramedics who responded above 50 consider themselves as above average in productivity. Eighty-seven percent of NBFD paramedics perceived themselves as above average in productive and 98% of other paramedics responded above average for productivity.

The two intentions to quit questions were used to examine not only the groups' intentions to quit, but whether the responses on their empowerment and job satisfaction questions were related to how they responded to the intentions to quit questions. The first intention to quit question asked if they planned to decertify or promote out of the fire paramedic positions. The original question from Firth et al. (2004) was modified to apply to this particular organizational structure. Using both decertify or promote out in the same questions was important because a fire paramedic that is no longer interested in the paramedic job is not likely to walk away from their livelihood but may opt to demote or promote out which results in the same outcome. The graph indicates that NBFD paramedics were more likely to have intentions to decertify or promote out, while other paramedics were significantly less likely to consider these options (see Appendix B).

The second intention to quit question was also modified from the original question. Using the terms "new position" or "assignment" are equivalent because either response signifies the desire of an employee to leave the paramedic program, and is intended to account for common nuances in how fire service agencies staff the paramedic job. The nomenclature may differ on whether the fire paramedic job is a rank or an assignment, but the outcome, a change in position through demotion or promotion, or re-assignment, is equivalent.

The NBFD respondents are clearly split on this question, where other paramedics are less likely to look for a new job or assignment (see Appendix C). Reviewing both the NBFD and other paramedics' responses for empowerment, job satisfaction, and productivity in relation to their responses to the intentions to quit questions indicate that feeling of empowerment (i.e., lower percentages on the four sets of cognition) has a greater impact on the NBFD fire paramedics' intentions to quit.

Discussion

Previous research has validated the relationship between four sets of cognition (meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact) and empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995). Validated questions from the survey used in Spreitzer (1995) were used to evaluate the feelings of empowerment in NBFD paramedics and other paramedics from across the United States. The results demonstrate a similar trend for both the NBFD fire paramedics and other fire paramedics in the United States. Overall the responses for competence, self-determination and impact decreased. However, the NBFD percentages were slightly lower for all the cognitions but considerably lower in value for competence, self-determination, and impact. As stated in the literature review, meaning is the value of a work related goal, when judged in relation to the ideals and standards of an individual; competence is an individual's belief in their ability to perform an activity skillfully; self-determination is an individual's sense of choice in regulating their actions; and impact is the degree to which an individual can influence strategic, administrative, or operating outcomes at work (Spreitzer, 1995). If any one of these dimension is lacking, Spreitzer (1995) states feelings of empowerment decrease, though not be eliminated completely. The responses from all the paramedics calls into question "How empowered are employees in this field of work?" and more importantly, "How are these decreased feelings of empowerment affecting the NBFD fire paramedics' intentions to quit the position?" The low percentages for competence, self-determination, and impact suggest that NBFD paramedics have lower competence in their ability to perform an activity skillfully, and don't feel like they have the capacity to make independent choices or have influence over outcomes. In general this data suggest that paramedics feel that they have limited autonomy in their job and have very little influence in their respective organizations.

Research suggested there is a link between job satisfaction, empowerment, and intentions to quit. Intention to quit is influenced by job dissatisfaction, lack of commitment to the organization as well as feelings of stress (Firth et al., 2004). Furthermore, workers who feel empowered experience increased job satisfaction, work productivity and a decreased propensity to leave the organization (Koberg et al., 1999).

Job satisfaction was evaluated between the NBFD fire paramedics and other paramedics using validated questions from Firth et al. (2004). Questions about job securities pay and benefits and satisfaction with the firehouse and apparatus were predominately satisfied or very satisfied. The data from this study demonstrates that both NBFD paramedics and other paramedics surveyed across the nation responded positively to the job satisfaction questions concluding these paramedics are happy with their career choice.

Responses for recognitions and job advancement were lower than the other questions. This difference might have occurred because individuals with higher organizational rank, and tenure, feel more empowered (Koberg et al., 1999). In the NBFD fire paramedics are below supervisor status and the data from the survey indicates that this is the situation in the National group of fire paramedics as well. From the research we know that employees with supervisory status feel more empowered (Koberg et al., 1999). The fact that fire paramedics are not high in the organizational rank may be related to the fire paramedics' lower responses. Furthermore, a lack of supervisor support was a predictor of job dissatisfaction and intention to leave a job (Firth et al., 2004). Issues of recognition for doing a good job are important and may be indicative of NBFD fire paramedics to look for other positions in the next year.

The influence that job satisfaction has on productivity has been previously been measured (Koberg et al., 1999). In this research, the respondents reported high productivity for both the

NBFD fire paramedics and the other fire paramedics. Since job satisfaction was also rated high by the respondents, a relationship between job satisfaction and productivity is supported by this data.

Intention to quit was perhaps the most dramatic illustration of the challenge for the NBFD. The survey respondents' responses are somewhat unclear for NBFD and more consistent with research for the National group. The variables most often associated with intention to quit are job stress, stressors, lack of organizational commitment and job dissatisfaction (Firth et al., 2004). For the National group of fire paramedics there were mixed results in the responses. Issues of job security and the work itself were rated very high. Other issues of pay and benefits, and freedom to do a good job begin to trend downward. Further, advancement possibilities and recognition for a job well done were low with only a 50% satisfaction value. The NBFD sample was much more narrowly spaced throughout the satisfaction questions. While none of the values were exceptionally high there was higher satisfaction with the pay and benefits than the National group. Recognition for a job well done was somewhat higher in NBFD but issues of job security and satisfaction with the work were lower. The data shows half of the NBFD fire paramedics intended to seek another position in the next year. This is in contrast to the national group of fire paramedics, where less than a third intend to change out of the position in the next year. Although both groups indicated decreased feelings of empowerment, the NBFD fire paramedics had lower responses on the four sets of cognitions compared to other paramedics. This demonstrates that NBFD fire paramedics struggle more than other fire paramedics across the nation in terms of feelings of empowerment. Since empowerment is a personality trait that is not general across all life situations, but rather specific to the work environment (Spreitzer, 1995), it needs to be resolved in the work place.

The need to address this problem is paramount as, after funding the training and certification of a fire paramedic, it is important that the City of Newport Beach realize a return on the investment. Perhaps a look into the leadership styles of our supervisors and managers to ensure that we are using transformational behaviors, as learned in the Executive Development course at the National Fire Academy, could be one method to address this important issue. However, a thorough investigation and analysis of what is behind these responses in the NBFD will be necessary in the search for a sustainable recruitment process.

However, it is significant that in the NBFD, the intention of half of the fire paramedics is to seek a new position in the next year. Replacing a paramedic position requires, under normal circumstances, sending someone away from the workplace to enter paramedic training, then paying overtime expenses to fill the vacant position. If the candidate is successful in completing paramedic training and certification, the result is a very new fire paramedic who will need several years of experience to feel competent, an important cognition related to empowerment and job satisfaction. If we factor in that half of this job population at the NBFD is seeking a change in the next year, and that we have experienced difficulty in recruiting, the challenge before us becomes clear.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the lack of control of those who were given an opportunity to complete the survey. This was a problem because it limited our ability to narrow the respondent field to fire paramedics most similar in rank and position to NBFD fire paramedics. Another limitation was the inability to identify and compare responses for those who responded negatively on empowerment, and job satisfaction, and, the intention to quit questions.

The reason we could not identify respondents was due to our lack of knowing exactly who received the survey outside of the NBFD. The distribution procedure, by delivering the survey through a third party, i.e., fire chiefs' association website administrators, did not provide for the tracking necessary to capture data to create an identifier that would allow for this type of comparison. Finally, this study is limited to self-report data without secondary data from fire departments on the number of requests for decertification or promoting out to confirm high rates of intention to quit in this job position. This information was not requested from the employers of the individual survey respondents due to the survey distribution method.

Future Studies

This study was designed to be a comparison study between NBFD fire paramedics and other fire paramedics from across the United States. To improve upon this study would be to use a more accurate method to determine the fire paramedics most qualified to complete the survey before mailing the survey. This would require some type of mailing list with contact information. This would not only allow us to know the response rate, but help us increase the response rates by sending reminder emails. In addition, the ability to contact this participant could make it possible to conduct interviews and obtain qualitative data to support the quantitative data.

Implications

The research findings indicate that on global level fire paramedics, although they have a relatively high level of job satisfaction and perceive them as highly productive; their feelings of empowerment are limited. More specifically, NBFD fire paramedics have a large percentage of fire paramedics who are intending to change out of the position in the next year. This is

important from the broader perspective because of the connection between empowerment and job satisfaction and, subsequently, intention to quit. For NBFD it is important because of the need to recruit people into the fire paramedic rank who will choose this as a milestone in their career and become fully developed in this job before seeking change. The inherent challenges to the training and certification of a paramedic, together with the recruitment challenges specific to the NBFD, combine to form a serious problem with the potential exodus. To address this issue a more detailed understanding of the specifics related to the cognitions of self-determination and impact with NBFD fire paramedics should be completed. This may include a career tract that would permit an employee to be a paramedic in all of the individual ranks through fire captain.

Recommendations

To address the issues identified through this research study the following recommendations are provided:

- Leadership training for line supervisors and management personnel. The design, development, funding and execution of a training program to standardize the supervisory performance of NBFD company officers and management personnel and to encourage the use of transformational behaviors between supervisor and subordinate members.
- Establish a paramedic fire company, staffed with a standard complement of members, including a company officer, in which all of the members could be a certified paramedic. This would provide a career track for employees who are upwardly motivated but still want to promote and maintain the paramedic certification. This deployment model would dramatically improve the direct supervision capabilities of

the NBFD and provide for continued development of transformational behaviors as well as enhance intergenerational understanding necessary in the contemporary work environment.

- Establish a formal process to evaluate the efficacy of the implemented changes. Using a combination of members from management and labor, establish a formal group to meet on a regular basis to monitor the implementation and value of the recommendations. This group would have regularly scheduled meetings and report directly to the Fire Chief.

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Appendix A


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Paramedic questionnaire

Please rate each statement about your job on a five point scale ranging from strongly disagree agree to strongly agree.

[Add Question Here](#)

[Edit Question](#) [Move](#) [Copy](#) [Delete](#)

*** 1. The work I do is very important to me.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Choose one response ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

[Add Question Here](#) [Split Page Here](#)

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2. My job activities are personally meaningful to me

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Choose one response ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

[Add Question Here](#) [Split Page Here](#)

[Edit Question](#) [Move](#) [Copy](#) [Delete](#)

3. The work that I do is meaningful to me

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

response

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4. I am confident about my ability to do my job

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Choose one response

☐

☐

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Paramedic Questionnaire

Please rate each statement about your job on a five point scale ranging from strongly disagree agree to strongly agree.

[Add Question Here](#)

[Edit Question](#) [Move](#) [Copy](#) [Delete](#)

***5. I am self assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Choose one response ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

[Add Question Here](#) [Split Page Here](#)

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6. I have mastered the skills necessary for my job

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Choose one response ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

[Add Question Here](#) [Split Page Here](#)

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7. I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

response

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8. I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Choose one response

☐

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Paramedic Questionnaire

Please rate each statement about your job on a five point scale ranging from strongly disagree agree to strongly agree.

[Add Question Here](#)

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***9. I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.**

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Choose one response

[Add Question Here](#) [Split Page Here](#)

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10. My impact on what happens in my department is large.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Choose one response

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11. I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Choose one response

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12. I have significant influence over what happens in my department.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree


Choose one response

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Paramedic Questionnaire

Please rate each statement about your job on a five point scale ranging from strongly disagree agree to strongly agree.

Add Question Here

Edit Question
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***9. I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.**

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

Choose one response

Add Question Here
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10. My impact on what happens in my department is large.

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

Choose one response

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11. I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department.

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

Choose one response

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12. I have significant influence over what happens in my department.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree


Choose one response

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#4. Paramedic Questionnaire
>>

Paramedic Questionnaire
Please rate each statement about various aspects of your job on a five point scale from satisfied to dissatisfied.
Add Question Here

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*** 13. How satisfied are you with your job security?**

Very Dissatisfied
Dissatisfied
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
Satisfied
Very Satisfied

Choose one response

Add Question Here
Split Page Here

Edit Question
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Delete

14. How satisfied are you with the physical conditions of the firehouse and fire equipment/apparatus.

Very Dissatisfied
Dissatisfied
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
Satisfied
Very Satisfied

Choose one response

Add Question Here
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15. How satisfied are you with the benefit package you receive for your job (health insurance, sick leave, vacation)?

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Choose one response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Add Question Here](#)
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	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Choose one response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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#5. Paramedic Questionnaire
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Paramedic Questionnaire

Please rate each statement about various aspects of your job on a five point scale from satisfied to dissatisfied.

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*** 17. How satisfied with the recognition you get when you do a good job?**

Very Dissatisfied
Dissatisfied
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
Satisfied
Very Satisfied

Choose one response

Add Question Here
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Edit Question
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Delete

18. How satisfied are you with the freedom you have to do the best you can at your job?

Very Dissatisfied
Dissatisfied
Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied
Satisfied
Very Satisfied

Choose one response

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19. How satisfied are you with your advancement to better positions since you started working for the fire department?

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Choose one response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<div>Add Question Here Split Page Here</div>					
<div>Edit Question Move Copy Delete</div>					
20. How satisfied are you with the work you do?					
	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Choose one response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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#6. Paramedic Questionnaire
>>

Paramedic Questionnaire
Please rate your overall level of productivity and effectiveness at work using this scale: 0=not productive at all, 50=average productivity, and 100=best worker in the fire department.
Add Question Here


Edit Question
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***21. On a scale from 0 to 100, please rate your overall level of productivity and effectiveness at work.**
0-10 11-20 21-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71-80 81-90 91-100
Choose one response

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<< #7. Paramedic Questionnaire >>

Paramedic Questionnaire

The following statements are related to your job performance and intention to change paramedic status within the organization. Please answer each of the following items.

Add Question Here

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*** 22. How often do you think of decertifying as a paramedic or promoting out of the paramedic position?**

Very Often
Fairly Often
Sometimes
Occasionally
Rarely/Never

Choose one response

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*** 23. How likely are you to look for a new position or assignment with the same organization over the next year?**

Very Likely
Likely
Not Sure
Unlikely
Very Unlikely


Choose one response

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Paramedic questionnaire

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***24. Your gender is:**

☐ Male

☐ Female

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***25. How old are you?**

[Add Question Here](#) [Split Page Here](#)

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***26. What position do you currently hold within your organization?**

[Add Question Here](#) [Split Page Here](#)

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***27. Number of years working for a fire department.**

Years

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*** 28. What level of education have you obtained?**

Some High School

Completed High School

Some College

Completed College

Choose one response

☐

☐

☐

☐

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*** 29. What State do you work in?**

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Appendix B

Intentions to Decertify or Promote Out of the Paramedic Position

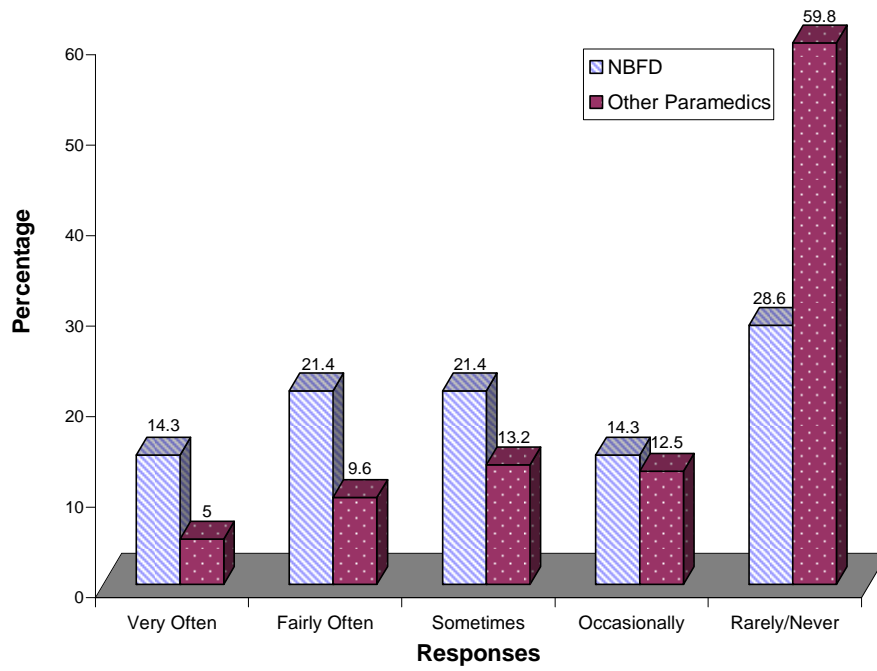


Figure 1. Percentage of survey respondents who indicated their intentions to decertify or promote out of the paramedic position

Appendix C

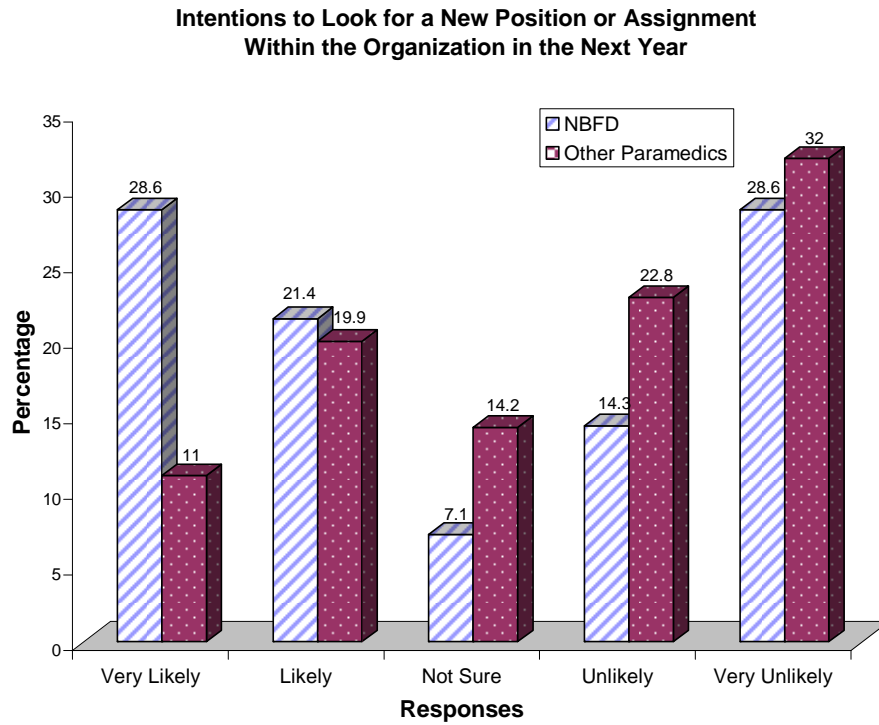


Figure 2. Percentage of survey respondents who indicated looking for a new position or assignment within the same organization in the next year.